

# ELEANOR ROOSEVELT



Eleanor Roosevelt was perhaps the most influential of all President's wives. She was also the most criticized and the most revered of First Ladies, with her power and influence deep and lasting. But she was not a feminist and she deplored any emphasis on sex differentiation in the political arena. She denied any influence over her husband on political affairs. But who could deny that she was a force to be reckoned with. She was subjected to personal abuse by both women and men for her homely features, her high-pitched voice and her views, but she basically ignored their criticism and forged ahead.

Although she was born into a privileged family, she made an early commitment to political activism and helping the poor. Mrs. Roosevelt was deeply involved in all the big causes of her time and devoted special attention to social inequality. She was idolized by Blacks and broke with the Daughters of the American Revolution because they once closed Constitution Hall to Marian Anderson, a famous black singer. Her following played a large role in swinging millions of black votes to the Democratic Party, a move that shows that trend yet today.

She credits her political education to Louis Howe, her husband's advisor, who constantly encouraged both of them and masterminded the Roosevelt political campaign. When Franklin was stricken with a disabling disease, it was Howe and Eleanor who convinced him to return to full-scale political life. Although she supported Franklin's every move and served as his constant advice, she did not particularly relish the role of being First Lady. The country was deeply entrenched in the Great Depression, and the steps taken by her husband to solve the many problems took Eleanor to all parts of the world and caused her a great deal of personal sacrifice. But she weathered all storms and became totally committed to the programs of her husband's New Deal. She served in the capacity of First Lady longer than anyone else, since her husband died shortly after being elected to an unprecedented fourth term of office. She was then appointed as the United States delegate to the United Nations, a position to which she brought dignity and prestige. She also threw her heart into support of the Democratic Party and fought for Adlai Stevenson in his 1952 and 1956 bids to become President. When she died in November of 1962, her death was mourned all over the world by countless people who had better times because of her.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

**For Thinking and Discussing**

1. There were millions of people who considered Eleanor Roosevelt one of the greatest women in history. There were others who disliked her a great deal. Why would someone with such a profound personality be the subject of such personal abuse and criticism?

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2. How did she overcome her handicap of speaking in public with an uncontrollable, high-pitched giggle that destroyed the effectiveness of her serious messages?

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3. How is Eleanor Roosevelt credited with bringing millions of loyal black votes to the Democratic Party?

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4. Who exerted the most influence in creating the political fire and spirit that was so much a part of Eleanor Roosevelt?

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5. Although Eleanor Roosevelt did many things to influence and encourage equal rights for women, she also helped the cause of Blacks. Describe the incident with the famous black singer Marian Anderson which made her a hero among Blacks.

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## For Further Research

Eleanor Roosevelt was indeed an amazing woman. Her special interests and accomplishments were only briefly touched in the biographical sketch. Research from other sources and list in detail the achievements of this very special woman.